

FOREWORD

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Interview with Henry R. Luce, Editorial Chairman, TIME
Incorporated by John L. Steele, Chief, Washington Bureau,
TIME-LIFE.

Thursday, November 11, 1965, at 3:30 P.M., in the office of
Mr. Luce, TIME & LIFE Building, Rockefeller Center, New York,
New York.

* * *

STEELE: Mr. Luce, in 1940 you wrote a foreword to a book
called "Why England Slept," by a young man just out of Harvard.
His name was John F. Kennedy and in your foreword you wrote:
"If John Kennedy is characteristic of the younger generation...
many of us would be happy to have the destinies of this
republic handed over to his generation at once." Twenty-one
years later the destiny of the republic had been handed over
to John F. Kennedy, with his election to the presidency, and
you wrote another foreword, to the 1961 edition of "Why
England Slept." How did you come to write the foreword for
the early, the 1940 edition?

LUCE: Well, the immediate circumstance was that I was asked
to do it by John Kennedy's father, who was then Ambassador to the
Court of St. James's Ambassador Kennedy called me up by overseas

SENILE: Now some time later after this session, indeed in October 1962, you received an urgent call from President Kennedy to come to the White House for a briefing on the then unfolding Cuban missile crisis. Thereafter you visited Defense Secretary Robert McNamara and John McCone, then director of the Central Intelligence Agency, for a look at the aerial reconnaissance photos. At the President's instructions you were shown by Secretary McNamara and Mr. McCone the aerial reconnaissance photographs taken of the missile sites in Cuba. After the session with the President I believe that you took some notes on the meeting for your own archives, and I wonder whether you would tell us something about that meeting, how it came about perhaps and what was said.

LUCE: Well, when the President made his television speech to the nation, to the world, I happened to be in Detroit and of course everybody was very much moved by it. The next morning I was on my way to Chicago and at the Chicago airport I was told that there was a telephone call from the President and so I went to Washington. By coincidence I happened to occupy a seat next to the Chief Justice; I don't know why...he had been out making a speech in Chicago. So we came in to see the President about four or five o'clock, I should think, we meaning me and Otto Fuerbringer, the managing editor of TIME, and when we left the meeting we went to your office, and I debriefed

myself and you wrote a memorandum as to what he said for our private recollections. And I suppose now that this is history it is not inappropriate to put this in the record if the historians want it.

After looking over your account of what we reported then I wrote one of my own some weeks later, a week or so later, I wrote my own impressions in a little more personal way. I visited with the President for about 45 minutes. He looked tired but the conversation was entirely in a serious, I was going to say nonemotional, tone. But it was emotional, because it was deeper than any ordinary emotion, because the President evidently felt that the situation was very serious and that the worst could happen. I think when I came in, I expressed my appreciation for his calling us in at the time and he said with a smile, "Well, you've been very interested in Cuba for a long time." I replied, "Not just Cuba, the global situation."

And then Mr. Fuerbringer, adding a few notes, recalls that when we left, after I had thanked the President again for his visit, the President said, "Well you have been the strongest advocate of vigorous action in Cuba and you were right." I'll put this in the record.

Then we went over to the Pentagon and were shown this extraordinary display of reconnaissance photographs which I must say I was very impressed by. There was some question as to whether

reconnaissance shouldn't have picked up the missile sites sooner, but I must say looking at the photographs you could see how extremely difficult it was to spot the beginnings of these locations.

STEERLE: Mr. Luce, I gather from what you told me at the time about the session with the President, that there was no attempt on the President's part to justify anything or to sell TIME anything. It was really more of an exploration.

LUCE: He just wanted to be sure that we knew the circumstances, and I went on to say that I deeply appreciated the President calling us in at that moment. He didn't have anything particular to tell us, but I think the main thing he wanted us to have a good look at the photographs.

STEERLE: You recalled at the time.....

LUCE: ...the dates as to when they were taken and so forth and then next week TIME published four pages or more of these photographs to explain the whole situation.

STEERLE: You met the President before the crisis was resolved...

LUCE: Oh, yes.

STEERLE: At a very touchy point.

LUCE: Oh, he was extremely worried.

STEERLE: And you and Mr. Fuerbringer came away with an impression that the unfolding crisis might hold within it the imminent probability or at least possibility of invasion of Cuba.

LUCE: The most important thing, too, he was very concerned about Berlin, and obviously there could be a double play there if the Russians had wanted to get us to concentrate entirely on Cuba they might take that occasion to overrun Berlin. So there were the elements of huge catastrophe.

STEELE: I understand the refrain of "Berlin, Berlin" ran throughout the discussions. Your notes show that he kept putting a question to you personally: "Are you for or against invasion?" And I think that your attitude at the time was that this was a corner that you were not going to be drawn into, that you weren't for an invasion, that you were for blockades and had been editorially for some time. Is that not correct?

LUCE: Yes, he brought that up before, months before, so at that time...well, I wasn't undertaking...as I say there really was no argument between the President and us at this time. It was a very serious moment and all we could feel was the sense of tremendous responsibility on him that the worst would not happen and that we would back him up in any case with the deep hope that everything would turn out not too badly.

STEELE: Your notes show that while you were not for invasion you did speak out for a blockade, but you...

LUCE: Well, so to be prepared for an invasion.

STEELE: "I also always added, of course, that a blockade would have to be backed up by readiness to invade." Those

are your words.

LUCE: Exactly.

STEELE: Certainly that confrontation, missile confrontation in Cuba, and the successful resolving was a high point in the conduct of Kennedy foreign policy. Did you ever feel that it held extremely dangerous potentials? How do you feel it was handled, in general, aside from your...

LUCE: It seems to me it was handled very well. Isn't this your recollection that we on the whole said that at the time in our reporting of it?

STEELE: In the magazine, yes.

LUCE: I think it was handled very well. Well, obviously while I couldn't exclude the deep personal fear that atomic war might happen, I really didn't think it would. That doesn't at all diminish the seriousness - potential danger - of such a confrontation, but I think this is not relevant really to my report of the President. I did think a strong stand could be taken without dire consequences so that I wasn't - Well, as far as the difference between being President and not being President, if I had been President, no doubt I wouldn't have been able to go to sleep, but my own personal opinion as an individual, as an editor, was that I thought that a strong show of force in any case was the only thing to do, and I believe that... As a matter of fact, the thing was resolved somewhat

more easily than I thought it would be. The Russians backed down quicker than I thought they would. I thought there might be more longer moments of worrying about what might happen.

Now, that's enough about that, isn't it?

There is one thing I would like to talk about - the tax cut. This was one of my other occasions when I told the President - I forget what particular reason it was - anyway when I had occasion to go and see the President, I think the year was '61, the first year, and this does come into some dispute later on. It's a trivial dispute, really, about whether TIME was inconsistent or right, or whatnot. Having occasion to go to see the President in Washington, I also asked for an interview with Secretary Dillon, a personal friend of mine, as well as having known him officially in Washington under the Eisenhower regime. And I brought up with Secretary Dillon, as I had with Secretary Anderson under Eisenhower, the question of major tax reform. Some years before then, in the late fifties, FORTUNE ran a three-part article, in which we, in effect, re-wrote the whole tax system of the United States. There wasn't a single person that agreed with us in toto. As far as I can see nobody agrees - you can hardly get two people to agree on all items of taxation. But at any rate, it wasn't - what we undertook to do was more than advocate a tax cut. We undertook to set reform...